Introduction

The local transportation infrastructure supports the varied needs of residents, local businesses, visitors, and through-traffic. It provides the means by which people and materials flow to and through the community. This chapter summarizes the existing transportation system and provides a 20-year plan that will serve as a resource guide and implementation tool for maintaining an efficient transportation system within the Town of Oconto Falls. Multi-modal enhancements will provide increased mobility for seniors, people with disabilities,



pedestrians, and bicyclists, among others. Finding solutions to current challenges, and planning to avoid future ones, is a primary goal of the Transportation Chapter of this plan.

Transportation Vision

The Town of Oconto Falls will maintain a safe and efficient transportation system primarily oriented around personal vehicles and agricultural machinery, but including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, senior/disabled transit, and offroad trails (among others), in areas appropriate for such multi-modal alternatives.

Current Transportation System

The Town's formal transportation network is comprised of state and county highways and town roads. These are supplemented by an informal system of private and farm roads, pedestrian routes (primarily paved and gravel road shoulders), and seasonal trails (snowmobiles, ATVs, etc.). Residents enjoy convenient access to State Highway (STH) 22 and STH 32. Personal vehicles provide the primary means of mobility.

The current transportation system is shown on the Transportation Network map appearing on page 4-4.

Highways and Roads

As mentioned above, state and county highways and town roads dominate the local transportation network. Highways and roads are classified based on traffic volumes, land uses, road spacing, and system continuity. *Functional classification* is essentially the grouping of highways and streets into categories based on the type of service they provide. The four general functional classifications are freeways, arterials, collector roads and streets, and local roads and streets.

Freeways

Freeways are fully controlled access highways that have no at-grade intersections or driveway connections. There are no freeways in the Town of Oconto Falls and none likely to be constructed during the next two decades. The nearest freeway is Interstate 41.

Arterials

Principal and minor arterials carry longer-distance traffic flows between activity centers. These facilities are the backbone of a highway system and are designed to provide a high amount of mobility with limited access. United State Highway (USH) 141, located approximately three miles east of the City of Oconto Falls, is an arterial. Although STH 22 and STH 32 provide services similar to an arterial, they are more accurately described as collectors.

Collectors

Collectors link local streets with the arterial street system. These facilities collect traffic in local areas, serve as local through routes, and directly serve abutting land uses. STH 22 and STH 32 are classified as collectors, along with the most widely used local county highways.

Locals

Local roads and streets are used for short trips. Their primary function is to provide access to abutting land uses. Traffic volumes and speeds are relatively low. Examples of locals in the Town include lightly used county highways and town roads.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Oconto Falls' transportation system is comprised primarily of town roads and county highways. All of these have been designed for vehicular traffic and possess limited capabilities for serving alternate forms of transportation. Some of the more lightly travelled town roads allow for relatively safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Oconto County (East) Bicycle Map appearing on the following page identifies existing bicycle trails and roads identified as 'best' or 'moderate' for on-road pedestrian bicycle access.

Transit Service

Transit service is not available in the Town of Oconto Falls. The community possesses neither the total population nor population density to support a public transportation system. The Oconto County Commission on Aging (OCCA) provides transportation to the nearest Nutrition Center, shopping, and medical facility for adults in need age 55 and over and people with disabilities. A vehicle owned by OCCA is equipped with a wheelchair lift provides scheduled door-to-door service throughout the county.





Rail Service

There are no active railroad corridors in the Town of Oconto Falls. Freight railroad service via a stub of the Escanaba and Lake Superior Railroad is available in the City of Oconto Falls.

Air Service

J. Douglas Bake Memorial Airport is a public use airport located approximately two miles southwest of the central business district in the City of Oconto. The municipal airport has been in service since 1948 and possesses two runways, one asphalt and the other turf. The nearest commercial airport is Austin Straubel International Airport located in the City of Green Bay. The airport provides regular passenger and airfreight service to a number of cities in the U.S. and Canada. The airport also serves general aviation (GA) needs. Austin Straubel is classified as a Small Hub/Commercial Service facility. Small hub airports are



Courtesy AirNav.com

those that enplane between .05 percent and .25 percent of total U.S. passenger enplanements. Commercial service facilities support regularly scheduled year-round commercial airline service and support the full range of GA activity and international destinations.

A number of smaller airports and private airstrips are located within a one-hour drive of the community, including a 2700' airstrip located in the northern part of the Town of Oconto Falls parallel to Pipgrass Road.

Water Transportation

The Oconto River is the primary water feature in the Town. The river is classified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) as a navigable stream and is potentially capable of supporting water-based transportation opportunities. However, the Oconto River is primarily used for recreation purposes. The nearest commercial ports are located in the cities of Green Bay and Marinette.



Truck Transportation

STH 22 and STH 32 are the primary trucking routes through the Town of Oconto Falls, as designated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). The designation of a truck route is based upon the design of a roadway and its ability to withstand the traffic and weights associated with trucking.

Transportation Plan

The land use pattern and transportation system in Oconto Falls is typical of a rural community and largely oriented around serving personal vehicles and farm machinery. The issues and recommendations presented on the following pages recognize this reality and are intended to provide enhancements to the existing system, allowing it to efficiently serve the needs of the community during the next two decades.

Maintaining Town Road Rural Character

The Town of Oconto Falls takes great pride in its rural roadways. Residents believe it is these rural, hilly roads that help to shape the character of the community. As such, the Town would like to maintain its rural roadways to the fullest extent possible. When improvements projects are considered, the Town encourages that a minimum of roadside trees are removed.

Pavement Surface Evaluation & Rating

All Town roads are evaluated in accordance with WisDOT requirements using Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating (PASER). PASER is a visual inspection system developed to provide a condition rating for community roads. It is an important tool for planning that provides a picture of road conditions on all roads and identifies candidates for maintenance and rehabilitation. Surface defects, cracking, and potholes are all examined during a typical PASER evaluation. Paved roads are rated on a 1-to-10 scale based on their condition. Gravel Roads are rated 1-5.

•	Paved Roads	
	Rating 9 & 10	No maintenance required.
	Rating 7 & 8	Routine maintenance, crack sealing and minor patching.
	Rating 5 & 6	Preservative treatments (seal coating).
	Rating 3 & 4	Structural improvement and leveling (overlay or recycling).
	Rating 1 & 2	Reconstruction.
•	Gravel Roads	
	Rating 5	No maintenance required.
	Rating 4	Good; routine maintenance.
	Rating 3	Fair; ditch improvement & culvert maintenance; gravel in some
		areas.
	Rating 2	Poor; new aggregate; ditch reconstruction & culvert maintenance.
	Rating 1	Failed; rebuilding.

The Town of Oconto Falls maintains a record of PASER ratings for all roads under its jurisdiction. Please contact the Town Clerk to obtain a copy of the latest PASER ratings.



Courtesy Town of Minong, Wisconsin

Paved vs. Gravel Roads

Road maintenance generally accounts for the largest town budget expenditure. With recent cuts in state funding, a greater portion of the cost of repairing and replacing paved roads falls on local taxpayers. In communities like Oconto Falls, where many of the roads experience light traffic loads or are primarily used by agricultural equipment, some may question the merit of expending such a large percentage of limited Town resources on their upkeep.

The paved roads that brought rural America

into the 20th century are starting to disappear across the Midwest in the 21st. Local officials, facing rising pavement prices, shrinking budgets and fewer residents, are making tough decisions to regress. Many rural roads are deteriorating faster than they used to because farm and industrial equipment are heavier than ever. Meanwhile, the cost of pavement has risen dramatically in recent years. Some engineers estimate it costs up to \$300,000 to replace a mile of paved road surface now. Gravel isn't free, but it's far less expensive. With maintenance costs included, engineers have often used a rule of thumb that a road needs 150 to 200 cars a day, or the equivalent in heavyweight traffic, to be worth paving.¹

Rebuilding an asphalt road today is particularly expensive because the price of asphalt cement, a petroleum-based material mixed with rocks to make asphalt, has more than doubled over the past 10 years. Gravel becomes a cheaper option once an asphalt road has been neglected for so long that major rehabilitation is necessary. Some experts caution that gravel roads can be costlier in the long run than consistently maintained asphalt because gravel needs to be graded and smoothed. The moves have angered some residents because of the choking dust and windshield-cracking stones that gravel roads can kick up, not to mention the jarring "washboard" effect of driving on rutted gravel. But higher taxes for road maintenance are equally unpopular.²

Rustic Roads

One method of identifying and protecting rural roads is seeking rustic road designation from WisDOT. The Rustic Roads System in Wisconsin was created by the State Legislature in 1973 to help citizens and local units of government preserve what remains of Wisconsin's scenic, lightly traveled country roads for the leisurely enjoyment of bikers, hikers and motorists. Unique brown and yellow signs mark the routes of all officially designated Rustic Roads. These routes provide bikers, hikers, and motorists with an opportunity to leisurely travel through some of Wisconsin's scenic



¹ Excerpted from *Making a Rural Comeback: The Old Gravel Road*, Minnesota Star Tribune, March 2011.

² Excerpted from *Roads to Ruin: Towns Rip Up the Pavement*, Wall Street Journal, July 2010.

countryside.

A small placard beneath the Rustic Roads sign identifies each Rustic Road by its numerical designation within the total statewide system. Each road is identified by a number assigned by the Rustic Roads Board. To avoid confusion with the State Trunk Highway numbering, a letter "R" prefix is used (i.e., R50, R120, etc.). WisDOT pays the cost of furnishing and installing Rustic Roads marking signs. An officially designated Rustic Road remains under Town control. A Rustic Road is eligible for state aids just as any other public highway. To qualify for the Rustic Road program, a road should:

- Have outstanding natural features along its borders such as rugged terrain, native vegetation, native wildlife, or include open areas with agricultural vistas that singly or in combination uniquely set this road apart from other roads.
- Be a lightly traveled local access road, one which serves the adjacent property owners and those wishing to travel by auto, bicycle, or hiking for purposes of recreational enjoyment of its rustic features.
- Not be scheduled nor anticipated for major improvements which would change its rustic characteristics.
- Entail a minimum length of 2 miles and, where feasible, provide a completed closure or loop or connect to major highways at both ends of the route.

A Rustic Road may be dirt, gravel, or paved. It may be one-way or two-way. It may also have bicycle or hiking paths adjacent to or incorporated in the roadway area. A maximum speed limit of 45 mph is established by law. A speed limit as low as 25 mph may be imposed by local government.

Managed Access

One technique to maintain rural roadside character and control traffic access is to utilize managed roadway access techniques. Roadway access refers to the number of points of ingress and egress from a roadway. Managing roadway access points helps to promote safe and efficient travel and minimizes disruptive and potentially hazardous traffic conflicts. Managed roadway access involves minimizing the number of driveways along a roadway and establishing standards for driveway spacing. Rather than promoting driveway after driveway along rural roads, shared driveways and streets are encouraged (see diagram). This concept may be appropriate for residential and commercial development along STH 22, STH 32, and more highly utilized town roads.



Farm Travel Needs

The Town of Oconto Falls is a farming community and wishes to remain so. It takes great pride in its farming operations and believes farming should be an important part of the Town's future. Modern farming operations often require farmers to travel with large equipment on local roads. These large, slow moving vehicles may present a potential hazard for other motorists and can increase road wear.

Implements of Husbandry

Act 377, Wisconsin's Implements of Husbandry law, made changes in the way agricultural vehicles and equipment operate on state, county, and local roads. Act 377 established more flexible limitations for weight limits imposed on farm machinery forged a compromise between the agricultural community and local officials. The legislation was intended to balance the need for farm equipment to operate legally and safely on roads with the need to protect local infrastructure. As of April 2014, an implement of husbandry (IOH) is defined as:

- A self-propelled or towed vehicle manufactured, designed, or reconstructed to be used and that is used exclusively in the conduct of Agriculture.
- A combination of vehicles in which each vehicle in the combination is an IOH.
- A combination of vehicles in which an IOH farm wagon, farm trailer, or manure trailer is towed by a farm truck, farm truck tractor, or motor truck.

Effective November 1, 2015, a slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem is a required marking on any type of IOH, including animal drawn, that usually travels at speeds less than 25 mph. It is to be displayed at all times on the most visible rear area of the vehicle or combination of vehicles. If a SMV emblem on a power unit is visible from rear and in compliance, then the towed units are not required to have an SMV emblem. It is allowable for two or three vehicle combinations to have more than one SMV emblem. These emblems should be mounted pointing upward perpendicular to route of travel, with the lower edge 2 to 6 feet off the ground, and either centered or as near to the left of center of the equipment as practical. SMV emblems must be bright and clean, and should be replaced if faded.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Like most rural communities, the town does not have an interconnected street network bounded by a system of sidewalks. Many of the activities that would normally occur on sidewalks or pathways, such as walking and bicycling, take place in driving areas or on narrow road shoulders. This poses risks for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. To create a pedestrian and bicycle system that complements the existing road network, the Town may:

- Seek funding to add wider, paved shoulder to town roads.
- Encourage residential developers to incorporate trails systems in proposed subdivisions.
- Work with Oconto County and WisDOT to include pedestrian and bicycle facilities along county and state highways when these routes are repaired or reconstructed.

Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan

The primary mechanism for creating a pedestrian and bicycle system is a Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan. Such a plan identifies existing and potential bicycle routes and pedestrian improvements within the Town. It would also identify and prioritize pedestrian/bicycle facility needs and provide references for best practices in planning, designing, implementing, and maintaining those facilities. A Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan would serve as a blueprint for continuous improvement of pedestrian and bicycling conditions throughout the township.

Equestrian Trails

As the Town examines the potential for pedestrian and bicycle trails, consideration may also be given to equestrian trails. Future equestrian trails can be coordinated with existing and future recreational facilities.

Infrastructure for Electric Vehicles

Plug-in hybrid and full electric vehicles are becoming increasingly common on America's roads. Electric plug-in stations are being constructed in cities around the country. These systems may be installed by state and local government or provided by business owners as value-added options at local coffee shops and shopping centers. The Town may consider working with local businesses to consider providing the infrastructure to support electric vehicles. Modular electric plug-in stations are available that do not require extensive infrastructure support. They can generate as much as 16 kWh daily from solar collectors and store up to 22 kWh in on-board batteries. The solar arrays on these systems are capable of tracking the sun's movement to ensure maximum electrical generation.



Courtesy Envision Solar

Capital Improvements Plan

A capital improvements plan (CIP) assists in planning for major project costs by creating a multiyear scheduling plan for physical public improvements, including transportation. The schedule is based on the projection of fiscal resources and prioritization of improvements five to six years into the future. Capital improvements include new or expanded physical facilities that are relatively large in size, expensive, and permanent. A transportation-oriented CIP outlines a community's capital item needs and purchase plans, including:

- Park acquisition and improvements
- Public buildings improvements and maintenance
- Emergency vehicle purchase and replacement
- Trail development
- Street improvements (e.g. widening, crosswalks, signalization, corridor studies, etc.)

Capital items are generally defined as those that are expensive (cost \$5,000 or more) and will last at least 3-5 years. The CIP also includes improvement projects required for the community's future and the appropriate timeline and funding to be followed to implement the improvements. The CIP process helps to ensure that improvements are made in a logical order and do not surprise local officials or taxpayers. It allows the community to focus on needs and goals and establish rational priorities.

Consistency with State and Regional Transportation Plans

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law (Chapter 66.1001(2)(c), Wis. Stats.) requires that communities to compare their local transportation plan with state and regional transportation plans. Applicable state, regional, and county transportation have been reviewed during the development of this chapter. The goals, objectives, and policies of this document are consistent with and implement all relevant sections of the following plans and programs.

Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020

WisDOT completed the Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020 in 1998. The plan establishes goals, objectives, and policies for both urban and rural bicycling, and recommends strategies and actions for WisDOT, local governments, and others to take to implement the plan. The goals of this plan include encouraging bicycling and increasing the number of bicyclists in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020

WisDOT's Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020 was established to make pedestrian travel a viable, convenient, and safe transportation choice throughout Wisconsin. While the plan primarily aims to minimize barriers to pedestrian traffic flow from State Trunk Highway expansions and improvements, it also provides guidance to local communities on how to encourage pedestrian travel through the creation of pedestrian plans, increasing enforcement of pedestrian laws, adoption and implementation sidewalk ordinances, and the identification of pedestrian issues through the public participation component of comprehensive planning process.

Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2020

This plan provides a framework for the enhancement of public use airports in Wisconsin. Of the 143 public use airports in the state, 100 are part of the State Airport System addressed by this plan. Based on the coverage, facilities and services of existing airports, as well as anticipated demand, no new airports are to be developed and no existing airport is to be eliminated. The plan provides recommendations for needed improvements related to pavement and tarmac, instrument capability, and airport service.

Connections 2030

Connections 2030 is the WisDOT long-range transportation plan for the state. The plan addresses all forms of transportation over a 20-year planning horizon: highways, local roads, air, water, rail, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit. Connections 2030 envisions an integrated multimodal transportation system that maximizes the safe and efficient movement of people and products throughout the state, enhancing economic productivity and the quality of Wisconsin's communities while minimizing impacts to the natural environment. WisDOT officially adopted Connections 2030 in October 2009.

Midwest Regional Rail Initiative

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, a cooperative, multi-agency effort that began in 1996 and involves nine states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin) as well as the Federal Railroad Administration, has a plan to develop a passenger rail system that offers business and leisure travelers shorter travel times, additional train frequencies, and connections between urban centers and smaller communities. Should this service be implemented, it would provide opportunities for travel throughout the Midwest without using personal vehicles.

Regional Transportation Work Program

The Regional Transportation Work Program is administered by Bay Lake Regional Planning Commission (BLRPC). BLRPC has provided transportation planning services since 1972 to address both area-wide and local transportation issues. The Regional Transportation Work Program is funded primarily by the Federal Highway Administration with matching funds from WisDOT and BLRPC, with additional revenues provided by specialized planning contracts.

Funding to Develop the Transportation System

A variety of state and federal programs are available to assist local government in funding transportation projects.

Local Roads Improvement Program

The Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP) assists local governments in improving seriously deteriorating county highways, town roads, and city and village streets. The competitive reimbursement program pays up to 50% of total eligible costs with local governments providing the balance. The program has three basic components: County Highway Improvement (CHIP); Town Road Improvement (TRIP); and Municipal Street Improvement (MSIP).

Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is administered by WDNR to preserve natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and expand outdoor recreation. Funds from the program can be used for the construction of off-street trail system systems.

Highway Safety Improvement Program

The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) is administered by WisDOT. Funds are used for highway safety projects at locations that have a high crash history. The objective of the HSIP is to develop and implement stand-alone safety projects that will reduce the number and severity of crashes. The funding ratio for this program is 90% federal and 10% local match.

Transportation Alternative Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) provides funding for projects that include onroad and off-road facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, conversion of railroad corridors to trails for pedestrians, bicyclists and other non-motorized users, environmental mitigation, Safe Routes to School and community improvement activities.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Program

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Program is a grant program under TAP that provides funding to construct or plan for bicycle or bicycle-pedestrian facility projects. State statutory language specifically excludes pedestrian-only facilities such as sidewalks and streetscape projects. Construction projects costing \$200,000 or more are eligible for funding, as are planning projects costing \$50,000 or more. Additionally, completed projects must be usable and not staged so that additional money is needed to create a useful project. Project sponsors must pay for a project and then seek reimbursement from WisDOT. Federal funds will provide up to 80% of project costs, while the sponsor must provide at least the other 20%.

Transportation Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The goals, objectives, and policies related to transportation are presented in Chapter 10: Implementation.

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